

Education Cabinet

May is Better Hearing and Speech Month

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FRANKFORT, Ky. - More than 30 million Americans are exposed to hazardous sound levels on a regular basis that can result in hearing loss. Individuals of all ages can develop noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) without being aware of the loss.

“People experience a variety of sounds in their environment every day. It’s important for people to be aware that noise from things such as television, radio, trucks, motorcycles, leaf blowers, power tools and personal music devices, especially those used with earphones could have a harmful effect on their hearing. When an individual is exposed to sounds that are too loud or loud sounds over a long time, sensitive structures of the inner ear can be damaged and cause NIHL,” said Susan Brown, audiologist and board member for Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH).

“NIHL can be caused by a one-time exposure to loud sound, as well as by repeated exposure to sounds at various loudness levels over an extended period of time. As a result, NIHL can cause sounds to become distorted or muffled and may make it difficult for the person to understand speech. It is important for people to recognize the hazards and take steps to protect their hearing,” Brown added.

Noise exposure occurs in the workplace, in recreational settings and at home. Noisy recreational activities include target shooting and hunting, snowmobiling, riding go-carts, woodworking and other noisy hobbies, and playing with power horns, cap guns and model airplanes. It makes no difference where you live; both urban and rural settings offer their own brands of noisy devices on a daily basis.

The loudness of sound is measured in units called decibels. Normal conversation is approximately 60 decibels, the humming of a refrigerator is 40 decibels, and heavy city traffic noise can be 85 decibels. Examples of sources of loud noises that cause NIHL are motorcycles, firecrackers, and firearms, all

emitting sounds from 120 to 150 decibels. Sounds of less than 80 decibels, even after long exposure, are unlikely to cause hearing loss.

To Prevent Noise-Induced Hearing Loss:

- Know which noises can cause damage (those above 85 decibels).
- Wear earplugs or other hearing protective devices when involved in a loud activity (special earplugs and earmuffs are available at hardware stores and sporting good stores).
- Be alert to hazardous noise in the environment.
- Protect children who are too young to protect themselves.
- Make family, friends, and colleagues aware of the hazards of noise.
- Have a medical examination by an otolaryngologist, a physician who specializes in diseases of the ears, nose, throat, head, and neck, and a hearing test by an audiologist, a health professional trained to identify and measure hearing loss.

How Loud is TOO Loud?

Decibels

150	Firecracker
120	Ambulance siren
110	Chainsaw, Rock concert
105	Personal stereo system at maximum level
100	Wood shop, Snowmobile
95	Motorcycle
90	Power Mower
85	Heavy City Traffic
60	Normal Conversation
40	Refrigeration humming
30	Whispered voice
0	Threshold of normal voice

Take this simple test to identify your hearing needs:

- Do you have a problem hearing over the telephone?
- Do you have trouble following conversations when two or more people are talking?
- Do people complain that you turn the TV volume up too high?
- Do you have to strain to understand conversations?
- Do you have trouble hearing in a noisy background?
- Do you find yourself asking people to repeat themselves?
- Do many people you talk to seem to mumble or not speak clearly?
- Do you misunderstand what others are saying and respond inappropriately?
- Do you have trouble understanding the speech of women and children?
- Do people get annoyed because you misunderstand what they say?

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO THREE OR MORE OF THESE QUESTIONS you should see an otolaryngologist (an ear, nose and throat specialist) or an audiologist for a hearing evaluation.

To obtain additional information on noise-induced hearing losses contact:

American Academy of Audiology (AAA)

11730 Plaza America Drive, Suite 300

Reston, VA 20190

Voice: (703) 790-8466

Toll-free Voice: (800) 222-2336

TTY: (703) 790-8466

Fax: (703) 790-8631

E-mail: info@audiology.org

Internet: www.audiology.org

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

10801 Rockville Pike

Rockville, MD 20852

Voice: (301) 897-5700

Toll-free Voice: (800) 638-8255

TTY: (301) 897-0157 Fax: (301) 571-0457

E-mail: actioncenter@asha.org

Internet: www.asha.org

Hearing Loss Association of America (formerly Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc.)

7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200

Bethesda, MD 20814

Voice: (301) 657-2248

TTY: (301) 657-2249

Fax: (301) 913-9413

E-mail: info@hearingloss.org

Internet: www.hearingloss.org

Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA)

7995 East Prentice Avenue, Suite 100

Greenwood Village, CO 80111

Voice: (303) 224-9022

Fax: (303) 770-1614

E-mail: nhca@gwami.com

Internet: www.hearingconservation.org

**If you need more about services for deaf or hard of hearing individuals in Kentucky,
please contact the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

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